



What is the Australian model for managing cultural diversity?

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to assess the Australian approach to managing a culturally diverse workforce by examining the outcomes of this approach.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper applies Syed and Özbilgin's relational, multilevel framework for managing diversity to study policies at three interrelated levels. At the macro-national level, the paper examines legal and public policy initiatives for managing cultural diversity. At the meso-organisational level, the paper discusses a variety of workplace diversity management approaches. This discussion encompasses the legal requirements for organisations to remove discrimination, and to create an equal employment opportunity workplace. A voluntary management approach known as "diversity management" is also outlined. At the micro-individual level, the paper examines unique employment-related issues faced by ethnic minority workers because of their ethnic, linguistic and religious identities. The multilevel perspectives are synthesised in a model labelled "the Australian model for managing cultural diversity".

Findings – The legal framework in Australia places only limited obligations on organisations to manage cultural diversity. As a consequence, while a range of organisational responses have proliferated, an integrated approach towards managing culturally diverse workers is absent. The paper argues that, unless cultural diversity is tackled at multiple levels and in a more integrated way, any attempt to either understand or manage such diversity may prove unrealistic.

Originality/value – The paper offers helpful advice to decision makers at the macro-national and meso-organisational policy levels *vis-à-vis* developing a realistic understanding of managing diversity through a multilevel framework.

Keywords Australia, Equal opportunities, Migrant workers

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Cultural diversity is a key feature of Australia's national identity that continues to influence its socio-cultural and economic potential. Australia's population includes a high proportion of overseas-born people (23 per cent) (ABS, 2004, p. 2), who are readily visible in the labour market. Approximately 25 per cent of Australia's workers were born overseas in 2006, with 15 per cent originating from non-English speaking background (NESB) source countries (DIMA, 2006a). The lived reality of these

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statistics has transformed Australia's historical self-image from one of a largely British-based nation to a multicultural society, warranting new discourses and policies to cater for the needs and aspirations of a diverse population (Bertone and Leahy, 2001, p. 1).

Over the past two decades, successive Australian governments have debated a requirement to monitor the labour market outcomes of newly arrived skilled migrants. Concomitantly there has been considerable public ambivalence regarding the scale and implications of a changing demography, in particular the ongoing admission of linguistically and racially diverse migrants from NESB source countries (Hawthorne, 2005). Despite the fact that migrants can now be found right across the occupational structure[1], from unskilled labour to professional and managerial jobs (Bertone, 2004), the stereotyping of migrant workers persists, e.g. exaggerated reports of the employment opportunities available to the newcomers, which by extension fuel distorted public perceptions and policy making (Bertone, 1999). There is also some evidence of discrimination being levelled against migrant workers, particularly Asian migrants, which could be attributed to pure discrimination or structural barriers such as employers' lack of willingness to adequately recognise qualifications gained in Asia (see Junankar *et al.*, 2004; Parr and Guo, 2005).

Scholars have expressed concern regarding the simplistic ways in which cultural diversity has been tackled at the government policy level (Ho, 2006). The official Diversity Works policy in Australia, which was in place until a change of government in 2007 seems to be based on a narrow preoccupation with the productive benefits of ethnic diversity at work without adequately taking into account issues related to equal opportunity and discrimination (Bertone, 2002). Government policy has promoted the idea that "there are benefits in fully utilising the talents of all members of a workforce regardless of ethnicity (or gender or age or sexuality etc)" (p. 2). However, little attention is paid to the broader societal, legal, and organisational challenges that migrant workers face in the host economy. It will, therefore, come as no surprise that even after 15 years of promotion of the government's Productive Diversity policy, progress in the area of equal opportunities remains "patchy and slow" (Ntatsopoulos and Kramar, 2004, p. 699; see also Kramar, 2004). In particular, managing culturally diverse employees attracts low priority in Australian organisations (Bourke, 2004). Indeed, as Bertone and Leahy's research (2001) reveals, only a few organisations have a policy commitment in place with respect to migrants, and, where present, such commitment is limited to legal compliance.

The purpose of this paper is to offer an assessment of the Australian approach to managing a culturally diverse workforce[2]. In addition it examines the implications of this approach for migrant workers from NESBs. This paper examines diversity policies in Australia at three levels using Syed and Özbilgin's (2007, n.d.) relational, multilevel framework for managing diversity. At the macro-national level, the paper examines the legal and public policy initiatives for managing cultural diversity. At the meso-organisational level, the paper examines extant management approaches to diversity within the formal employment sector. At the micro-individual level, the paper explores the unique workplace issues that migrant workers frequently have to confront; issues that may be attributable to their individual and intersecting identities. The paper then assesses the outcomes as well as the limitations of the policy initiatives in Australia, particularly in terms of their implications for NESB workers. The

multilevel perspectives are synthesised in a model labelled the Australian model for managing cultural diversity. The paper demonstrates that failure to operate at multiple levels in a more integrated way will impede an effective understanding and management of cultural diversity.

Macro-national perspective

At the macro-national level, this paper offers an examination of:

- government policy;
- legislation covering employment practices in the public and private sectors; and
- industrial relations legislation in Australia, with specific reference to managing a culturally diverse workforce.

Public policy

Historical context. First, it must be acknowledged that it was not only the British or other European migrants who brought cultural diversity to Australia. In 1788, when the first European fleet arrived in Australia, the Aboriginal population comprised approximately 600 different social groups speaking some 200 distinct languages and dialects. It may also be noted that the European arrivals in the Australian colonies were themselves fairly diverse. For example, over 4,200 of the convicts (about 2.6 per cent) despatched to New South Wales (NSW) between 1817 and 1840 were not Anglo-Celtic. In total, 900 were non-whites, and approximately 1,000 were Jews (CIA, 2006; Jupp, 2001).

However, the fact that the country was predominantly inhabited and administered by Anglo-Celtic migrants has historically shaped successive public policies towards migration and ethnic minorities. For example, in the nineteenth century the increasing number of Chinese and Pacific islanders entering Australia became a source of concern to the powerful élite, a concern that ultimately culminated in the infamous White Australia policy, embodied in the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. Initially, the focus of this policy was upon ending the employment of Pacific islanders brought in as cheap labour to work on the sugar plantations in the country's north (DFAT, 2006). From that time until the early 1970s, Australian policies regarding new migrants were based on exclusion and assimilation. Immigration was exclusively reserved for the British and later for people from Europe. Non-British migrants were expected to shed their cultural identities, including their native languages, in order to promote their rapid absorption into the host population (DFAT, 2006; D'Netto *et al.*, 2000). These policies, however, could not withstand the attitudinal changes that followed World War II and the growing acknowledgment of Australia's responsibilities as a member of the international community. In 1966, the Liberal-Country Party government began dismantling the policy, permitting the immigration of "distinguished" non-Europeans (DIMA, 2006b). The last vestiges of the White Australia policy were finally discarded in 1973 (DFAT, 2006), when multiculturalism was accepted and declared to be the Australian Government's preferred policy.

Contemporary policy. The current Australian policy is characterised by an emphasis on the productive or economic benefits of cultural diversity. The Diversity Works Policy (previously entitled Productive Diversity) seeks to promote the positive economic outcomes of managing cultural diversity. The policy commits the Australian

Government to three core strategic priorities: community harmony, access and equity, and diversity management. It operates throughout Australia to develop and disseminate management tools and business case studies based on best practice examples of how utilising diversity can contribute to organisational success. It seeks to encourage and support businesses to make better use of the language and cultural skills, business networks, marketing knowledge, and experience of Australia's culturally diverse workforce, and to remove any impediments to migrants' effective participation in the workforce (COA, 2005, pp. 7-10).

However, over the last few years and despite official rhetoric about the business benefits of cultural diversity, Australia has witnessed a phenomenon that may be termed "multicultural roll back". Mainstream Australian media and politics evince to varying degrees a visible resentment against multiculturalism. Jakubowicz (1989, p. 106) argues, that the hegemonic discourse of the mass media serves to fragment, isolate and scatter non-Anglo immigrants. Multiculturalism, according to Hart (2006, p. 3), is being projected as a "dirty" word. In a move seen as a shift in emphasis away from fostering diversity towards increasing integration and responsibility among migrants, the Government has canvassed alternative words to describe how ethnic communities harmoniously integrate into Australian society. For example (former) Prime Minister John Howard (Liberal-National coalition, 1996-2007), in a radio interview in 2006, suggested that some cultures are less equal than others. If multiculturalism:

means that we're going to encourage people to maintain their differences and that basically we have an attitude that, well, all cultures are equal, all cultures are the same, then I don't think people feel comfortable with that ... You can't have a nation with a federation of cultures. You can have a nation where a whole variety of cultures constantly influence and mould and change and blend in with the mainstream ... The core culture of this nation is very clear; we are an outshoot of western civilisation (Howard, cited in Johnston, 2007).

Recently, in 2007, the Government removed the word multicultural from the name of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs as part of a major revamp of its ethnic policy. The Department was renamed Immigration and Citizenship, suggesting that multiculturalism is no longer a priority at government policy level. This move took place against a backdrop of intense debate concerning what it means to be "Australian", with rising nationalism fuelled by fears that the country "is being torn apart by competing immigrant value systems" (Johnston, 2007).

It can, therefore, be argued that issues of exclusion and ethnic discrimination are still an everyday reality in Australia albeit expressions of intolerance have become less explicit perhaps given the socio-political sensitivities and economic realities of the day. In the next section, the paper will examine the legal framework of diversity management in Australia.

Legal framework

Anti-discrimination legislation. The anti-discrimination laws that Australia has had in place for approximately 30 years (Strachan *et al.*, 2005) have served to ensure equality of opportunities for a diverse population (French and Maconachie, 2004). The discussion in this section is limited to only those laws having direct implications for minority ethnic employees. However, sex discrimination legislation will also be discussed in order to encompass the intersectionality of sex and race. Discrimination is

a significant and persistent problem faced by minority ethnic women in Australian organisations (Syed, 2007). The following is a brief account of Australia's anti-discrimination laws.

The Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) makes racial discrimination unlawful on the grounds of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, being an immigrant (in some circumstances) or being a relative or associate of someone of a particular ethnicity or other status. The RDA has specific provisions making it unlawful to discriminate in a number of areas including employment.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (SDA) imposes obligations on employers to eliminate sex discrimination in the workplace. It also makes employers vicariously liable for the unlawful conduct of employees.

In order to protect the human rights of all people, the Australian Government established the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in 1986. The HREOC Act 1986 covers discrimination in both public and private sector employment on a range of grounds including religious and political affiliation. The HREOC administers a number of federal laws (including the RDA 1975 and the SDA 1984) that are aimed to protect people from discrimination in various aspects of public life including employment. The Sex Discrimination Commissioner of the HREOC also has responsibilities in relation to federal awards and equal pay under the Workplace Relations Act, 1996 (HREOC, 2007).

The Workplace Relations Act 1996 (WRA) has certain clauses that deal with discrimination including unlawful termination of employees on discriminatory grounds and equal remuneration for work of equal value. One of the objects of the WRA is to prevent and eliminate discrimination against diverse workers (ss. 3(j) and (k)). Under the WRA, minimum wages and conditions of employment are determined by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) and the Australian Fair Pay Commission (AFPC). The Act requires employers to explain proposed certified agreements (union or non-union collective agreements negotiated at the workplace level) to employees before their implementation, and urges employers to take into account the employees' particular circumstances and needs, for example, those of women, persons from an NESB, or young persons (s.170LT(7)). With respect to Australian Workplace Agreements (a form of individual agreement), employers must ensure that they contain anti-discrimination provisions prescribed by regulation. However, the recent Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005 seems to weaken the anti-discrimination clauses in the WRA 1996 (Sheldon and Junor, 2006); an issue that will be discussed later in this paper.

Equal employment opportunity legislation. The focus of the equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation in Australia has been on one designated group only, i.e. women. There is no specific EEO legislation for culturally diverse workers or migrant workers. The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 (EOWA) seeks to promote the principle that employment for women should be dealt with on the basis of merit, and aims to eliminate discrimination against women in relation to "employment matters". The act requires private organisations employing more than 100 workers to report annually to a government authority on their progress in implementing EEO programs. Those employers who do not meet the requirements of that authority may be named in the Federal Parliament. In this sense, EEO laws in Australia may be termed a much softer version of the affirmative action legislation in

the US. This soft emphasis sparked resistance by businesses (D'Netto *et al.*, 2000), despite the fact that the laws' major objectives were confined to raising business awareness of equity and diversity issues (Teicher and Spearitt, 1996; Strachan *et al.*, 2004).

Furthermore, the EOWA treats women as a single homogenous group without taking into account their multiple and intersecting identities. This is similar to the SDA, which covers discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, and family responsibilities but does not recognise the intersection of sex and race or ethnicity. Consequently, issues and challenges faced by minority ethnic women, because of the intersectionality of their race and sex, remain largely ignored (Syed and Ali, 2005).

Diversity management. The Public Service Act 1999 (PSA) requires federal authorities to develop, implement and review equal opportunities in the workplace. The act contains provisions highlighting the values of the Australian Public Service (APS), which include merit-based decision-making in employment and creating a workplace free from discrimination. The PSA 1999 requires the APS to provide a reasonable opportunity for all eligible members of the community to apply for employment. Under section 10, the APS must provide a workplace that is free from discrimination and recognise and utilise the diversity of the Australian community it serves. Under section 18, agency heads must establish workplace diversity programs to assist in giving effect to the APS values. Agencies are required not only to establish workplace diversity programs, which include all existing EEO provisions, but to go one step further by focusing on the links between diversity and organisational effectiveness (De Cieri and Olekalns, 2001, p. 32).

Unlike the EOWA, which applies only to women, the PSA requires the development of diversity management plans with the aim of eliminating discrimination on the grounds of gender, race or ethnicity (including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent) and physical and mental disability. The jurisdiction of the act is however limited to federal department and contractors. At the federal level, diversity works has been the official policy since 1992; however, it is not legally binding. Its main purpose is to promote the business benefits of managing cultural diversity. Devoid of any legal benchmarks and evaluations, the policy remains largely dependent on voluntary corporate initiatives.

Decentralised industrial relations[3]. The Australian response to workforce diversity was initially based on a centralised system of conciliation and arbitration, which, through reforms introduced in the 1990s, shifted to a "heterogeneous and fragmented system that emphasises workplace bargaining" (Strachan *et al.*, 2004, p. 196). Teicher and Spearitt (1996, p. 131) suggested that in view of the decentralised nature of the industrial relations (IR) reforms, the pursuit of equity would ultimately fall to activists and unions, a prediction that was proven true in subsequent years (e.g. Waring *et al.*, 2006). It has been argued that the shift towards a system of enterprise bargaining (a system of industrial relations which relies on workplace bargaining at enterprise and employee level), in conjunction with growth in non-standard forms of employment, could erode employment conditions and disadvantage workers. Teicher *et al.* (2002) argue and that the transition from a centralised system of conciliation and arbitration to a more deregulated labour market have compounded the disadvantage suffered by NESB workers. Their under-representation in trade unions (see Bertone *et al.*, 1995)

could mean that disadvantaged workers, such as NESB persons and women find it difficult to share in any productivity-based improvement in wages and conditions (Strachan and Burgess, 2000). This situation is believed to have particularly adverse implications for the employment conditions of ethnic minorities, migrants, women, and young workers (Bertone, 2004; Pocock, 2003; Wooden, 2000).

While trade union influence has eroded since the 1970s, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005 seems to have decreased their power even further. The act, it has been argued, enhances procedural rights by shrinking substantive rights. It provides for the AIRC to regulate unions, not the labour market, and shifts bargaining power in favour of employers thus in turn weakening the unions (Sheldon and Junor, 2006; Waring *et al.*, 2006). Waring and colleagues (2006) view the act as an attack on the living standards and employment conditions of the low paid in Australia; for example, workers in organisations employing up to 100 staff no longer come under the protection of the unfair dismissal laws. Employees of larger organisations are no longer protected if they are dismissed for “bona fide operational” reasons. This amendment has the potential to further aggravate the employment conditions of those individuals and groups who are vulnerable vis-à-vis discrimination and disadvantage in the workplace.

The foregoing demonstrates the disjointed and fragmented nature of the macro level policies employed in the management of a culturally diverse workforce.

Meso-organisational perspective

At the meso-organisational level, this paper discusses a variety of organisational approaches towards managing diversity, and the ways in which organisations in Australia have executed the principles of affirmative action, EEO, and/or diversity management. The discussion also takes into account organisational initiatives undertaken independently of the legislation.

Equal employment opportunity

Given that the focus of EEO legislation is predominantly upon women, organisational policies have mainly focused on increasing employment opportunities for women, with considerably less emphasis on ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups. Between 1985 and 2005, the workforce participation rate for women increased by 11 percentage points (Kelly *et al.*, 2005). Today, women make up approximately 44 per cent of the workforce in Australia; however, they hold a very small percentage of senior decision-making roles in organisations (Krautil, 2003). The participation rate in decision-making roles is rather low for NESB women and men (Bourke, 2004). These statistics are discussed later.

Since there is no specific EEO legislation for culturally diverse workers, little attention is paid at the organisational policy level to issues related to cultural diversity management. For example, according to a survey undertaken by the Equal Employment Opportunity Network of Australia (EEONA, 2005), organisations usually ignore potential issues related to the development and promotion of their employees from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. The EEONA research revealed that even in best practice organisations, equal opportunity programs tend to have a narrow focus, prioritising women, harassment, caring responsibilities and disability ahead of religion, nationality and race.

Furthermore, research suggests that the implementation of EEO in Australian organisations is largely driven by legal compliance, based on a “softly softly” approach in which an attempt is made to conciliate complaints behind closed doors (Thornton, 2006). Employers and managers talk about EEO and diversity to keep on the right side of the law and to make sure that new members of the workforce maintain a commitment to the organisation and its goals (Antonios, 1997). In practice, anti-discrimination laws have had a limited effect in facilitating cultural and attitudinal change in organisations (Pyke, 2005, p. 15). Increased emphasis on individual and enterprise agreements may mean inconsistencies in diversity approaches at the workplace level, giving managers greater freedom and prerogative to determine the policy. One of the consequences of this could be that employers are able to develop policies that suit the particular needs of the organisation. Thornton (2006) argues that this also means that rather than focus on the rights of employees and the conditions under which they work, the state is now concerned primarily with the freedom of employers to maximise corporate profits within a global economy.

Diversity management

The Diversity Works policy is not legally binding. However, as mentioned previously, the PSA 1999 offers a legal framework for managing diversity in federal agencies. The act requires all agencies in the Australian Public Service to take measures to ensure that all anti-discrimination laws are complied with; and that engagement decision-making by the agency takes into account the diversity of the Australian community, the organisational and business goals, and the skills required to perform the relevant duties. The following key indicators of diversity management are currently used in the APS:

- The agency clearly informs staff of their rights and responsibilities under the antidiscrimination provisions of the PSA 1999, the WRA 1996 and other anti-discrimination legislation.
- The agency has a workplace diversity program which meets the requirements of the PSA 1999 and the Public Service Commissioner’s Directions 1999, including promoting fairness in employment and helping employees to balance work, family and other personal commitments.
- Selection processes are sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of prospective applicants.
- Results of staff surveys held from time to time on both an agency and APS-wide basis indicate that staff are satisfied that the agency adheres to the APS values (APS, 2004).

While the above measures seem to provide a comprehensive legal framework at face value for diversity management; their practical effect is limited by the circumscription of jurisdiction to federal agencies and subcontractors. Other public sector organisations and private sector businesses do not fall under the purview of the PSA 1999.

In the private sector, diversity management represents a voluntary corporate strategy, which is considered to be closely linked, to business case justifications: increased productivity and performance (Bertone and Leahy, 2001; Coleman, 1995).

Outside the APS diversity management in Australia was pioneered by a small number of foreign-owned companies (Teicher and Spearitt, 1996, p. 124). For example, in 1992, Gardner and Palmer (1992, p. 218) suggested that Australian-owned firms and small firms were less likely to establish strategic human resources practices than large, foreign-owned companies. This seems to be an ongoing trend. For example, in 2004 Philip Bullock, CEO of IBM in Australia and New Zealand, was recognised by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency as the “Leading CEO for the advancement of women”. Previously in 2003, IBM Australia received a Partner Award for its longstanding commitment to – and support of – technical aid to the disabled (IBM, 2006).

There has been limited application of diversity management in Australia (Kramar, 2004). In fact, very few organisations are reported to have an integrated approach to diversity management. For example, Sammartino *et al.* (2004) conducted a survey of senior managers in 229 large organisations, using a combined analysis of diversity capabilities (practices) and diversity resources (heterogeneity of the workforce). Their study reveals that less than 20 per cent of Australian firms had “the bare essentials to develop the diversity management competencies required to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage” (p. 7).

According to a survey of some 1,500 organisations, the majority of organisations in Australia (more than 51 per cent) do not have a written policy on diversity management (AHRI, 2001). The survey reported a lack of integration of diversity management into human resource management strategies in Australian organisations. Instead, there was an inclination to treat diversity as a problem usually focused on flexible work and leave policies and to a lesser extent on the removal of barriers to NESB workers. It has also been reported that the CEOs of most organisations rank diversity policies and training significantly lower in importance than EEO. Most organisations do not keep adequate records on diversity (information pertaining to the ethnic backgrounds and language skills of their employees) and more than 20 per cent of organisations do not employ NESB workers (Nicholas, 2000). Similar findings are reported in other studies. For example, according to the EEONA survey (2005), diversity programs currently give higher priority to issues associated with harassment (91 per cent), women (75 per cent), caring responsibilities (69 per cent) and disability (59 per cent) than to issues such as religion (22 per cent) and nationality (25 per cent).

Even in best practice organisations, diversity management has a narrow focus, e.g. prioritising women, harassment, caring responsibilities and disability ahead of religion, nationality and race. The survey suggests that the major barriers to implementation include: a lack of recognition of the business benefits of diversity, a lack of accountability and commitment by senior managers, a general lack of awareness of diversity issues, and a lack of resources and effective tools for implementation. The EEONA survey investigated the diversity initiatives that organisations had introduced over the past two years. A total of 68 different initiatives were reported, covering a range of areas and issues. Activity levels were highest for: dependent care (16 per cent); work/life and flexible work practices (12 per cent); harassment/bullying (12 per cent); women (10 per cent); accountability (9 per cent); age (6 per cent); Indigenous (5 per cent), disability (5 per cent); and diversity training (5 per cent). Of note is the fact that there was a relative absence of initiatives addressing issues associated with race and ethnicity.

The state of diversity management is particularly grim in small businesses i.e. those employing less than 20 people. This sector is the largest employer of minority ethnic workers in Australia in terms of their proportion in employment. Ironically, the sector does not have to comply with the requirements of the equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation, which are applicable to large employers only. The growth of this sector has historically increased the marginalisation of women and minority groups as unionisation rates are low and employment and HR arrangements are often less formal (Muir, 2006; Syed and Ali, 2005; Teicher and Spearitt, 1996).

Micro-individual perspective

This section examines issues related to individual identities, perspectives and experiences in the labour market and in employment. In particular, it highlights the degree to which some of the unique issues related to NESB workers' multiple and intersecting identities are inadequately considered in managing diversity in Australia.

Unique issues faced by NESB migrants

This paper argues that the career trajectories of culturally diverse workers, in particular migrant workers, are shaped not only by their skills, but also by their individual, and multiple identities, such as their gender, ethnic, and linguistic identity, religion, visa status, and other forms of identity. Syed and Ali (2005) suggest that individual level issues may also include: lack of familiarity with local laws, limited command of the English language, and lack of local qualification or social networks. However, conventional "success narratives" of employment opportunities available to skilled migrants tend to disguise the complex contextual realities in which migrants' employment outcomes are equally influenced by broader socio-cultural factors (Syed, 2008). For example, NESB migrant women in Australia historically tend to be employed in much lower-level, lower-status, and lower-paying occupations than Australian-born women (Misztal, 1991). Similarly, Ho's (2006) study of Chinese migrant women in Australia reveals that women and men typically experience migration differently in the host labour market.

Indeed, migrants' careers and skills are deeply related not only to their gender role identities but also to other social factors such as family identity. For example, Junankar and Mahuteau's (2005) study shows the extent to which the number of people in the migrant household impacts on the quality of migrants' jobs in the host labour market. The larger the household, the less likely it is that the migrant holds – or is reported to hold – a good job. The study suggests that a large family puts more strain on the principal (migration) applicant, who is likely to lower his/her employment expectations relatively quickly after arrival in the host market, accepting whatever job is offered in order to meet the immediate needs of the family. Research also suggests that other forms of identity, such as language and cultural traditions, play a key role in shaping the career choices of migrant workers; for example, Bevelander (1999) reports the visible impact of social identity roles on the career trajectories of migrants in the Swedish context. Employment levels appeared to be greater among married men and women. Labour market adjustment appeared to be easier for migrants from countries that shared similarities with the host society, areas such as language proximity, occupational transferability, and the structure of the labour market. The motivation for

migration and the possibilities of return were also identified as important issues in migrants' adjustment to the host labour market.

Intersectionality of race and sex

Diversity management in Australia has generally focused on the participation of women in formal organisations (De Cieri and Kramar, 2005, p. 252). However, the discourse is predominantly focused on 'the mainstream woman' (the white Anglo-Celtic woman), overlooking the multiracial feminist perspectives of "the other woman", the minority ethnic woman (Syed, 2007). Legal procedures require women to choose either sex or race discrimination as the basis of their complaints; the dual and complex implications of intersectionality are not taken into account. Because of the intersection of her gender, ethnicity and cultural background, "the other woman" remains multiply disadvantaged within Australian society and organisations relative to her "mainstream" sisters. This is amply reflected in NESB women's concentration in precarious and low-grade jobs, and their under-representation in decision making positions in organisations (Syed and Ali, 2005).

There is some evidence of the lower occupational profiles of NESB women relative to their mainstream sisters. While the latter are usually found in clerical, service and sales jobs, NESB women are twice as likely as ESB women to be employed as labourers (13 per cent compared to 7 per cent) and eight times more likely to be employed as manual workers in intermediate production and transport jobs (17.5 per cent compared to 2.5 per cent) (Bertone, 2004). Ho's (2006) study demonstrates that migration has a major impact on Chinese women's employment patterns in Australia. Although Chinese women are generally highly educated and accustomed to an active labour force role, their migration to Australia is associated with a decline in labour market activity and an escalation in domestic responsibilities.

Outcomes

The lack of a coherent approach towards managing cultural diversity has resulted in adverse outcomes for NESB workers. Research suggests that NESB workers generally receive lower average incomes, suffer higher unemployment rates and find it more difficult to gain promotion than Anglo-Australians (Syed, 2007; Watson, 1996). Furthermore, they represent only 3 per cent of senior executives in organisations and 10 per cent of board members (Bourke, 2004).

Junankar *et al.*'s (2004) study unravel traces of discrimination, identifying two key issues faced by skilled migrants: first, the probability of being unemployed is likely to be different for the group discriminated against (given the same observable characteristics), and second, the transition probabilities of moving from unemployment to employment may be different for the group discriminated against, such as those from NESBs. Similar findings have been reported in other studies. Parr and Guo's (2005) study, based on Australia's census data (1996, 2001), revealed that Asian-Australian workers were found throughout the occupational structure, and that migrants generally experienced upward occupational mobility between 1996 and 2001. However, after controlling for a range of demographic and skills characteristics, the participation of most groups in managerial and professional occupations was found to be below that for Australia-born workers.

While an increasing awareness of population diversity and anti-discrimination legislation has indeed alleviated many problems related to blatant racial bias in organisations, actual employment outcomes do not offer a promising picture. Research suggests that NESB persons generally receive lower average incomes, suffer higher unemployment rates than their Anglo-Australian counterparts, and find it more difficult to gain promotion (Syed, 2007, 2008; Watson, 1996). Reflecting these difficulties, the number of complaints filed by minority ethnic women is surprisingly high. Within employment contexts, the incidence of race discrimination seems to be growing at an alarming rate. A significant number of race discrimination complaints were filed by individual females in the period 2002-2004: 34 per cent in 2003-2004 up from 27.5 per cent in 2002-2003[4].

As noted earlier, unlike the EOWA 1999 which focused on gender, no specific federal Act has been legislated to monitor and systematically eradicate racial discrimination in the workplace (with the exception of the PSA 1999, which is applicable to federal agencies and contractors only). Furthermore, in at least some respects, the scope of racial discrimination laws seems to be limited and conflicting across Australian states and territories. For example, in some parts of Australia, e.g. in Western Australia (WA) and in the Northern Territory (NT), it is not against the law to racially vilify another person. There are no specific laws in the states of NSW and WA and in the NT that deal with religious vilification or hatred (HREOC, 2005a, p. 77). Similarly, there is no specific federal legislation that prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of religion (Dent, 2002, p. 24).

Research also suggests that collective or group identity is generally ignored in organisations (Muir, 2006; Thornton, 2006), with employers' focus more upon legal compliance issues. However, the current legislation is limited in its ability to effect cultural and attitudinal change in organisations (Pyke, 2005, p. 15). For example, Kramar (2004) reports that at least in some organisations, diversity policies generally appear to symbolise a renaming of the EEO – not an integrated management approach. Work conditions are particularly grim in small businesses and in the informal sector, e.g. outworkers in the clothing industry, which employs a large number of NESB women as waged labourers (Alcorso, 2000).

The extent to which racial bias has affected equal opportunities for minority groups has been a matter of little debate. Legal proceedings highlight the difficulties faced by complainants in proving racial discrimination in the absence of direct evidence (Hunyor, 2003, p. 25; HREOC, 2005b). The chronic nature of racial bias and its implications for ethnic minorities were acknowledged by the Race Discrimination Commissioner in Australia when he stated:

[G]aping holes still exist. The entrenched deprivations suffered by indigenous Australians are unacceptable and embarrassing given our status as a first world country . . . The threat of terrorism has led to a marked increase in the level of prejudice experienced by Arab and Muslim Australians. It has also had a negative impact on the treatment of refugees and newly arrived immigrants (Doussa, 2005, p. 8).

The Australian model for managing cultural diversity

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that conventional single level conceptualisations of diversity and equal opportunity are inadequate in tackling the multilevel issues and challenges faced by NESB workers. This paper argues that in

order for organisations to pursue an integrated approach towards managing diversity, there is a need to deploy a relational, multilevel framework of diversity management (Syed and Özbilgin, 2007, 2009). A multilevel framework is useful in that it will bridge the divide between macro-national, meso-organisational and micro-individual insights to arrive at a realistic conception of managing diversity. Indeed, no single action taken by an organisation will result in the full benefits of diversity (McMillan-Capehart, 2005). An integrated approach to managing diversity is necessary to both capitalise on the advantages and minimise its challenges and problems.

The paper has argued that within both societal and workplace contexts, Australian society and policy makers have experimented with a number of policies ranging from efforts to assimilate migrants according to the mainstream (i.e. white Anglo-Celtic) culture towards a more inclusive multicultural approach promoting equitable and culturally sensitive inclusion of ethnic minorities. However, recently there has been evidence that Australian policy makers are attempting to roll back the multicultural policies to the previous policies of assimilation. Indeed, this is bad news for the future of managing diversity in Australia.

The paper established that that the equal opportunities legislation in Australia is complaint-based and by extension passive in nature. The laws aim to redress the grievances of the individual complainant after discrimination has already occurred (Strachan *et al.*, 2004, p. 196) and, as Thornton (1990, p. 17) argues, such legislation is focused solely on 'equality of opportunity with respect to access to some specified public sphere benefits, such as employment . . . it is silent as to the end result'. Thus, there are concerns about the ability of the legal framework to change any underlying culture, organisational dynamics or indeed attitudes of individuals (Ntatsopoulos and Kramar, 2004; Vedder and Whittard, 2006). Table I offers a summary of key features of the Australian response to managing cultural diversity. As well, it shows some limitations of the Australian response.

Table I demonstrates that diversity policies and practices in Australia are predominantly focused on gender and individuality. They lack the adequate resources and structures essential to enable full participation and inclusion of ethnic/racial and religious minority groups and individuals. The official Diversity Works policy may be termed a key feature of the Australian model for managing diversity, which appears to be instrumental in highlighting the business case of managing cultural diversity. Yet, there is evidence that workers' from minority ethnic backgrounds face ongoing structural disadvantage. Table I illustrates that in the absence of a comprehensive multilevel framework for managing diversity, Australian organisations are currently unable to adopt an integrated approach.

The paper has demonstrated that the Australian approach towards managing cultural diversity is characterised by a desire to decentralise workplace agreements and an inclination to integrate EEO with IR legislation. While this approach may have some effect in public sector organisations, it appears to have only a limited effect on small privately owned businesses. Kramar (2004, p. 25) reports that even in organisations that have a strong commitment to diversity management, the actual progress made is more consistent with an early stage of diversity development.

While there is a policy emphasis on developing voluntary initiatives in diversity management, to improve organisational productivity an integrated approach to diversity management is absent. The paper argues for a multilevel approach that is

Macro-national level	Meso-organisational level	Micro-individual level
<i>Features</i>		
Multiculturalism; EEO for women; diversity management in APS	Diversity Works Policy; human capital orientation (Syed, 2008)	Individual-oriented (Deery and Mitchell, 1999)
Emphasis on corporate voluntary initiatives (Bertone and Leahy, 2001)	The business benefits case of diversity management (COA (Commonwealth of Australia), 2005)	Special focus on women; minority ethnic women remain ignored (Syed, 2007)
Anti-discrimination legislation; weakened by decentralised IR (Waring <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	Legal compliance orientation; some evidence of progressive diversity initiatives	
Demographic and socio-economic considerations	Influence of multinational HQ diversity policies (IBM, 2006)	
<i>Limitations</i>		
Lack of a socially responsible approach towards diversity management (Syed and Kramar, 2007)	Lack of an integrated approach towards diversity management	Intersecting and multiple identities remain ignored (Syed, 2007)
Socio-cultural and structural challenges remain ignored; social justice remains a low priority	Inefficient social and business outcomes	Group identities remain ignored (Muir, 2006)
Lack of strict benchmarks and monitoring (Nicholas, 2000)	Under-representation of women and ethnic minorities in positions of power (EEONA, 2005)	Perspectives of disadvantaged groups including minority ethnic women remain ignored
Complaint-based system; weak legal accountability (Thornton, 2006)	Employees exploited by unscrupulous employers, particularly in small organisations in the private sector	NESB persons generally lack awareness of and access to legal rights (Syed, 2007; Syed, 2008)
<i>Way forward – a relational, integrated approach</i>		
Macro-national level: multicultural policies; elimination of discrimination in socio-economic, legal and cultural contexts	Meso-organisational level: inclusive workplace structures and routines	Micro-individual level: consideration of intersecting and multiple identities

Table I.
The Australian model for managing cultural diversity

based on simultaneous considerations of macro-national, meso-organisational and micro-individual level experiences and concerns of culturally diverse workers, in particular those from minority ethnic backgrounds. At the macro-national level, such an approach will be focused on developing pluralistic and multicultural policies eliminating discrimination in socio-economic, legal, political, and cultural contexts. At the meso-organisational level, it will focus on developing inclusive workplace structures and routines, such as removing any structural and cultural barriers in the employment, training and promotion of culturally diverse employees. At the micro-individual level, it will consider intersecting and multiple identities of culturally diverse individuals and the implications for their career trajectories.

Future policy initiatives by governments – as well as within organisations – may benefit from taking into account the interrelated and dynamic issues that NESB workers face at all three levels. Such a response may take the form of formal legal policies and a broader movement towards better cultural understanding and accommodation of cultural diversity. One possible approach is to engage ethnic communities and social support groups in the formulation and implementation of diversity policies. Such an approach may help bridge the gap between the official productive diversity rhetoric, EEO legislation and the realities faced by migrant workers. For example, Boje and Syed (n.d.) argue for “negotiated diversity management”, a pluralistic approach that takes into account the multiplicity of stories of culturally diverse employees in understanding and realising diversity management in the workplace. Given the fact that diversity is essentially about cultural norms and values, appropriate structural as well as cultural support is needed to create a truly inclusive work environment in which people from diverse backgrounds feel respected and recognised (Pless and Maak, 2004). This view is supported by Syed (2006), who argues that the participation of culturally diverse employees, particularly those from indigenous backgrounds, in corporate social responsibility initiatives is vital to achieving environmental as well as economic sustainability.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the extant Australian model for managing diversity does not adequately manage minority ethnic workers, particularly NESB migrants. It has highlighted specific conceptual limitations, meaning the Government and businesses remain incapable of integrating multilevel perspectives of managing workforce diversity. Informed by Syed and Özbilgin’s (2007, 2009) relational framework for managing diversity, the paper contends that organisations in Australia, and elsewhere, can achieve better business outcomes – as well as equity outcomes associated with a diverse workforce – by adopting a multilevel framework.

The paper has argued that the legal framework in Australia places limited obligations on organisations to manage cultural diversity, and, as a consequence, a range of organisational responses have proliferated. There is little evidence of an integrated approach towards managing NESB workers. Furthermore, Australia’s increasingly decentralised IR system and the official productive diversity rhetoric means that it will be difficult to ensure equity of employment in an increasingly business-outcomes-focused labour market. Policy makers at macro-national as well as organisational levels need to closely examine the inadequacy of extant diversity structures, in particular their adverse implications for NESB workers. This includes the latter’s current lopsided employment in low-grade jobs and their under-representation in boardroom and other executive positions. The paper suggests that diversity management initiatives will remain inadequate unless they take into account the joint impact of the intersecting processes of gender, race, ethnicity and religion.

The paper proposes that future policy initiatives at governmental as well as organisational levels must recognise diversity in employees’ backgrounds and perspectives rather than privileging the mainstream employees’ perspectives over those of “others”. Future researchers may opt to conduct a similar multilevel analysis of managing diversity in other countries. They could consider employing critical race

theory to unravel the traces of racial bias in the legal framework of equal opportunity and using a multiracial feminist approach to examine the implications of intersectionality of race and sex in various organisational contexts.

What is the
Australian
model?

Notes

1. In 2004-2005, skilled migrants represented about 60 per cent of the entire migration program (Phillips, 2006).
2. Cultural diversity may be defined as the spectrum of customs, mores, traditions, patterns, habits, and lifestyles exhibited or possessed by the totality of distinct cultural groups within a society (Williams, 2007). For the purposes of this paper, discussion is limited to ethnic, racial and religious dimensions of diversity, particularly in the context of NESB workers.
3. This term denotes a decentralised and deregulated system of industrial relations, which emphasises enterprise and individual employee level determination of pay and employment conditions.
4. Gender segregated data were not available for subsequent years.

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